

Chairman Kerns, members of the committee: My name is Amanda Armstrong and I am a citizen of Missoula.

I am here today as a member of the LGBT community and a supporter of House Bill 481.

I was born and raised in Billings, Montana. Feeling it was too small and closed-minded, I got out of there the day I could and swore I wouldn't come back. It took leaving and experiencing different places for me to realize what a truly incredible state Montana is. We are pioneers and free-thinkers. We have a somewhat impressive history of expanding rights and protecting the privacy and dignity of our citizens and I believe we should continue that tradition.

Of particular concern to me is the discrimination faced by the transgender members of our community. These are human beings. They are our friends and family and neighbors. These are people who daily face discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodation. People who, no matter their credentials, won't get the job because the name on their driver's license doesn't match their gender expression. People who can't use a restroom free from fear of confrontation. Transgender people are human beings and they deserve the opportunity to go about their lives free from discrimination and with a feeling of security. Decisions about housing and employment should be based on merit, not sexual orientation, nor gender identity or expression.

In the words of a once and former Montanan, "there is a deep streak of respect and intelligence in the Montanan mindset; there is an empathy for one's neighbors that goes beyond a simple respect of privacy. It's brusque, it is a little rough-hewn, but it follows logic over ideology. It grows from a community that at least tries to understand the mentality of its fellows."

Let's live up to that. Let us demonstrate the empathy, understanding and respect we have for one another. It is time to that we again take the lead in expanding human rights by extending the protections against discrimination provided by the Montana Human Rights Act to all citizens, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

I am proud to be a Montanan, and I hope Montana is proud to have me, a member of the LGBT community, as well.

I urge you do pass House Bill 481 and affirm that discrimination of any kind in unacceptable in Montana.

Thank you for your time and consideration.